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Introduction

Since the Brontës first published their novels, critics and readers have often associated the male leads with the Byronic hero. Certainly, Arthur Huntingdon in Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Edward Rochester in Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and Heathcliff in Emily's *Wuthering Heights* are all, like Lord Byron's own heroes, brooding and damaged men. Each of these men, additionally, is fundamentally willing to flout social expectations. Their search for self-fulfillment often leads them outside of the boundaries of conventional society, although the three sisters sometimes ascribe conflicting moral values to that search. For Charlotte and Emily, Rochester's and Heathcliff's strong personalities are fascinating, evoking immense masculine power. Yet for Anne, this idea of the "dangerous lover," a hero who can play simultaneously friend and enemy to the heroine, becomes more problematic. All three sisters may therefore invoke Byron's appealing prototype of the morally conflicted and socially isolated (anti-)hero, but they nevertheless incorporate that hero into their own texts in individual ways.

From an early age, Anne, Charlotte and Emily, along with their brother Branwell, were exposed to Lord Byron's poetry. For example, in 1834 Charlotte developed a reading list for her friend Ellen Nussey, including, among others like Shakespeare, Milton and Pope, Byron "with a caution against *Don Juan* and perhaps *Cain* but 'read the rest fearlessly'" (Brown 375). Reverend Brontë freely allowed his children access to his books, including the complete works of Byron (Moglen 25). This early exposure to the writing of Byron seeps into the Brontës' own juvenilia, as critic Christine Alexander observes, "Charlotte quotes freely from *Childe Harold*, *Manfred* and *Cain* throughout her juvenilia" and "[a]t twelve Branwell was writing poetic dramas in imitation of Byron and in *Caroline Vernon* Charlotte describes how reading Lord Byron can 'half-turn' the head of a romantic young girl"(21). The Byronic character of Zamorna dominates

Branwell and Charlotte's Angria tales, his self-destruction and tortured love affairs driving many of the plots. Similarly, Emily displays Byron's influence in her poetry situated in Gondal, her shared world with Anne. Poems like "The Philosopher" evoke the same fatal passion that she later channels as Heathcliff and Cathy's romance in *Wuthering Heights*. The Brontës' juvenilia, therefore, was highly derivative of Byron's texts and life, an influence that continued into their adult writing, albeit in the context of a more mature discussion.

Still, socially withdrawn and isolated on the Yorkshire moors, the Brontë sisters were in conversation first and foremost with themselves about literature. While they each adapted the Byronic hero, they were responding not only to the same literary convention, but to their sisters' own adaptations. As Jill L. Matus suggests, for instance, Charlotte and Anne most likely wrote *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* at about the same time period, an assertion that seems supported by their reversed plots (100). More generally, however, Anne's moralistic *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* contrasts pointedly with the romanticized anti-heroes of Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. As Anne belittles the idea of the dangerous lover's potential reform and the love of a good woman's power to save him, her sisters operate more closely within the popular framework, although Charlotte as well rejects the role of lover-redeemer for her heroine. Even so, all three refuse to define their heroines in relationship to the hero. Where a sister-author invokes the associated figure of the lover-redeemer, it is fundamentally to write against the idea as restrictive for the woman who must stand on that sacrificial pedestal and shape her identity completely around another's morality. Ultimately, Anne, Charlotte and Emily each reject in turn Byron's own gendered character type, extending Byronism to their heroines in a manner that is not only uncharacteristic of its creator but that is often, in fact, contradictory

with the subordinated heroine he represents in his texts. Unlike Byron, the Brontës' heroines are not mere counterparts to their Byronic partners, they are finally Byronic themselves.

I. The "Fatal Embrace" of the Byronic Hero

In the words of Lady Caroline Lamb, her lover Lord Byron was "mad, bad and dangerous to know," her characterization striking as well at the heart of his similarly dark hero. Edward Rochester, Arthur Huntingdon and Heathcliff all share the "virtues" of the Byronic hero in that they are each socially isolated and self-isolating, with enigmatic backgrounds, internalized moral conflicts and a powerful sexual magnetism. However, as the example of Byron's *Manfred* suggests, although the Brontë sisters may borrow the type of the Byronic hero, they also revise that character in their own texts. For Byron, the selfishness of his hero demands a selfless female counterpart, such as the hero-reflecting Astarte in *Manfred*. For Anne, Charlotte and Emily, though, their heroes exist in relation to their heroines, rather than the opposite; in each text, it is the woman's self-growth and actions that drive the narrative, centralizing her as the foremost producer of plot. Unlike Astarte in Byron's *Manfred*, Jane Eyre, Helen Graham, and Cathy and Catherine are individuals with personal identities in their own right, forcing the Byronic hero to change by conforming to a new gendered power dynamic between the hero and heroine.

In *Manfred*, the hero engages seven spirits in his quest for oblivion, as the quintessential Byronic hero, Manfred is tortured by his own humanity. He indicates the war ongoing within his nature, saying, "these eyes but close / To look within; and yet I live, and bear / . . . Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most / Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth, / The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life" (Byron 1.1 6-12). The flaws that he finds within himself, especially one that he first refuses to identify, wrack him with guilt. By referencing the Biblical

"Tree of Knowledge," the source of original sin in Judeo-Christian mythology, Manfred likens his personal crime to the basic bent towards sin in all of mankind. To be human, therefore, is to be imprisoned, and to be more aware of that prison the more aware you are of yourself. It is for this reason that he conjures the spirits, asking for "Forgetfullness / . . . Of that which is within me; read it there -- / Ye know it, and I cannot utter it" (Byron l.1 135-138). The spirits, however, insist to him that it is not within their power to grant him self-oblivion, once more indicating that moral consciousness is intrinsically an aspect of being human. "But --," the spirits say, "thou mayest die," (Byron 1.1 147) and find self-oblivion there, because death is also an expression of humanity through that mortality. According to *Manfred*, the Byronic hero is ultimately an individual addressing his humanity through transgression, as Manfred explores within his movement towards death.

In their turn, the Brontës embodied Byron's ideas of flawed humanity in their own heroes, characters like Manfred with ambiguous histories of mistakes and crimes. For example, Mrs. Fairfax, Rochester's housekeeper, asks Jane to excuse their employer's rudeness, "Partly because it is his nature – and we can none of us help our nature; and partly because he has painful thoughts, no doubt, to harass him and make his spirits unequal" (Brontë, Jane Eyre 111). Yet, Rochester, while brooding, lacks the true capacity for violence inherent in Heathcliff. As Charlotte Brontë wrote in her preface to *Wuthering Heights*, "Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is," before she apologized for her sister Emily on the grounds of the artist's powerful "creative gift" that "strangely wills and works for itself" (liii). At first, Lockwood obtusely does not recognize this capacity for violence inherent in Heathcliff's character, remarking "A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed to him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows"

(Brontë, Wuthering Heights 3). This violence becomes even more apparent through Mrs. Dean's narrative, as Heathcliff's love for Cathy begins to look like a crime through its role as a catalyst for the destruction of the Earnshaws and Lintons. Although to a lesser extent, Hareton Earnshaw, like Heathcliff, also possesses a belligerent presence within the text. Lockwood describes Hareton's greeting, among curses: "He glanced over the back of a bench, dilating his nostrils, and thought as little of exchanging civilities with me as with my companion, the cat" (29). Through these socially withdrawn and vaguely threatening characters, Charlotte and Emily re-contextualize the Byronic hero in the Gothic romance of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*.

As Anne Brontë herself suggests in her text, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, it is that new romanticized context that allows for the equal romanticizing of the Byronic hero. Whereas Rochester and Heathcliff are attractive in their Byronism, Anne's own hero Arthur Huntingdon, mired in realism in pointed contrast to her sisters' Gothicism, emerges only as an abusive rake. Huntingdon, like Rochester, Heathcliff and their prototype Manfred, operates well outside of the moral bounds of pre-Victorian society, but Anne's use of the Byronic hero corresponds, unlike her sisters, to a moralistic agenda. As Anne writes in her preface to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, "If I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsence" (Berry 71). Unlike Charlotte's and Emily's "soft nonsence" therefore, Anne strips Helen's husband of all the Byronic hero's illicit attractions. She leaves no enigma to his sins, cataloguing his debauchery in specific terms of adultery, alcoholism and abuse. When Helen first meets Huntingdon, she ignores her friend's tell-tale observation of drunkenness that "Mr. Huntingdon's face is too red" (Brontë, Tenant 169), but while Helen may be deceived, Anne never allows the reader to misinterpret Huntingdon's character or to mistake him for a

romantic suitor like Rochester or Heathcliff. Whereas Charlotte and Emily add to the cult of the "dangerous lover" in literature, Anne criticizes such glorification of his immorality.

All three texts, therefore, pair the heroine off with a man marked more by his faults than by his virtues, continuing the Byronic hero's subversion of the conventional lover. The Byronic hero becomes attractive for the very qualities that isolate him from society, his enigma and moral ambiguity. Still, at least Charlotte differed in her interpretation of Rochester against the harsh character of Huntingdon. In a letter to W.S. Williams, she writes,

> You say Mr Huntingdon reminds you of Mr Rochester – does he? Yet there is no likewise between the two; the foundation of each character is entirely different. Huntingdon is a specimen of the naturally selfish sensual, superficial man, whose one merit of a joyful temperament only avails him while he is young and healthy, whose best days are his earliest, who never profits by experience, who is sure to grow worse, the older he grows. Mr Rochester has a thoughtful nature and a very feeling heart; he is neither selfish nor self-indulgent; he is ill-educated, mis-guided, errs, when he does err, though rashness and inexperience: he lives for a time as too many other men live – but being radically better than most men, he does not like that degraded life, and is never happy in it. He is taught the severe lessons of Experience and has sense to learn from them – years improve him; the effervescence of youth foamed away, what is really good in him still remains. (Matus, 117)

Although W.S. Williams is suggesting that both Anne and Charlotte are incorporating the tradition of the "dangerous lover" into their texts, Charlotte rebuts him; she indicates that while Rochester may play the rake, he is not, at heart, such an individual. Yet, although Anne portrays Huntingdon as far more brutal than Charlotte's Rochester, both men do correspond to the convention of the "progress of the rake," as Matus puts it (118), a response to texts such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, in which the heroine's purity ultimately wins and then reforms the corrupt, erring hero. Anne strives to undermine the specific idea of the rake, made attractive by his potential to be saved by the love of a good woman, by refusing to let Huntingdon convert; however, while Charlotte may protest her own hero's difference, Rochester does "progress," largely as a result of the trauma of his relationship with Jane. In these texts, the progress of the

rake may thus dovetail with the social transgression of the Byronic hero, formulating a male character who becomes, for the heroine at least, sexually fascinating.

Still, both Anne and Charlotte state that they intended to write against the idea of the progress of the rake, even as both admitted his quasi-Byronic attraction. As Deborah Lutz posits, "The dangerous lover — the Byronic hero — becomes an emblem of the hero who ventures out into the anguished world in order to find, paradoxically, the self" (6). The appeal of such a self-seeking hero becomes evident in Charlotte's writing, assert Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, as early as her Angria tales, as they state that those "tales use Byronic elements to articulate female fantasies of liberation into an exotic 'male' landscape" (313). In *Jane Eyre*, Blanche Ingram suggests the conventional attractiveness of this extra-societal existence, as she tells Rochester at a party, "Oh, had you but lived a few years earlier, what a gallant gentleman-highwayman you would have made!" (Brontë 161). To which Rochester answers, "You would like a hero of the road then?" and Blanche says, "An English hero of the road would be the next best thing to an Italian bandit; and that could only be surpassed by a Levantine pirate" (161). Blanche's efforts to flatter Rochester, as she angles for social position and security as his wife, ironically counterpoints her own lack of choice as a woman with these fantasies of masculine freedom. Thus, interconnected with the rake's and the Byronic hero's capacities to achieve freedom is an idea of similar capacity for feminine freedom as his partner.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily similarly invokes the literary romances associated with the dangerous lover as a larger composite of the Byronic hero and the rake. When Heathcliff courts Isabella in order to gain revenge on Edgar Linton for marrying Cathy, he plays the role of the dangerous lover as laid out by contemporary literature. Later, Heathcliff mocks his wife, "She abandoned [her family] under a delusion . . . picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting

unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion" (Brontë, Wuthering Heights 149). Even though Heathcliff hangs Isabella's dog as they elope, it is only a long time after their marriage, that he says, "at last, I think she begins to know me" (149). In this way, Emily's own rejection of the Byronic hero's attraction is incomplete: While Isabella may not be able to elicit the lover over the demon in Heathcliff, Cathy can expect that kind of "chivalrous devotion" that Heathcliff passionately expresses to her on her deathbed. Heathcliff mourns for Cathy like Manfred mourns for Astarte – eternally and as the only person who understood him. Moreover, Emily associates Hareton as well with Heathcliff's Byronism, repeating the image of the hung puppies. In describing his flight from Wuthering Heights, Lockwood describes "[knocking] over Hareton, who was hanging a litter of puppies from a chair" (183). In the case of Hareton, this same gesture appears even more blatantly as an act of ruthless violence, yet in a context of ignorance rather than apparent romance. In this way, Emily underscores more vehemently the violence latent in the character of the Byronic hero, while not necessarily condemning it.

Still, while Cathy and Astarte, and ultimately Catherine as well, understand their lovers in their Byronism, they are not protected from that Byronic tendency towards self-destruction. As Emily suggests in *Wutherin Heights*, to exist in counterpart to a Byronic hero is to be inherently at risk. As Miller observes, Cathy and Heathcliff's romance is "a love of identity rather than difference, with overtones of sibling incest," a direct descendent of Manfred's self-oriented love for Astarte (195). The heroine in love with the Byronic hero thus endangers herself primarily through her partner's self-fixation. While the Byronic hero withdraws from the constraints of society, that is, the restrictions placed on him by others in terms of his behavior, he is at the same time still caged in his own self-destructive nature. As in *Manfred*, the hero is attracted first and

foremost to his individual selfhood, seeking in his lover the balance to his own inner conflict, as he demonstrates in his description of Astarte:

> She was like me in lineaments-- her eyes
> Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone
> Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;
> But soften'd all, and temper'd into beauty;
> She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,
> The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind
> To comprehend the universe: nor these
> Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,
> Pity, and smiles, and tears-- which I had not;
> And tenderness-- but that I had for her;
> Humility-- and that I never had.
> Her faults were mine-- her virtues were her own--
> I loved her, and destroy'd her!

In fact, Astarte reflects Manfred to such an extent that she seems at once his lover and his sister. As Emily reiterates in *Wuthering Heights*, Byron is continuing the Romantic discovery of one's self in another through incest, the other that most closely resembles one's own selfhood. Thus, not only does Astarte resemble Manfred in her "quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind / To comprehend the universe," but her body also resembles Manfred's, all parts of which "they said were like to mine" (Byron 2.2 199-211). In Joanna E. Rapf's words, the Byronic heroines "seek nothing for themselves except to serve and satisfy a single man. Each is as selfless as the Byronic hero is selfish. She is indeed his necessary opposite" (640). Astarte's virtues of "Pity, and smiles, and tears – which I had not" and "Humility – and that I never had" only serve to contrast and support Manfred's own masculine identity. Ultimately, Manfred's all-consuming love for Astarte is an all-consuming love for himself, which destroys her in the process.

As a hero-reflecting heroine, Astarte is only a counterpart to Manfred, the feminine object of his own love for himself. As Emily portrays Heathcliff and Cathy's love for each other as destructive in their consumption of each other, so too is Manfred's love for Astarte in the way

in which he appropriates her as an extension of himself. As Alan Richardson writes, "The effective cause of Astarte's obscure death is never revealed, but Manfred's words suggest that his love was itself fated to destroy its object, as its end was not to cherish Astarte, but to assimilate her" (751). As Manfred tells the spirits, "My injuries came down on those who loved me -- / On those whom I best loved: I never quell'd / An enemy, save in my just defence -- / But my embrace was fatal" (Byron 2.1. 85-88). This "fatal embrace" is the way in which the Byronic hero appropriates the subjectivity of his heroine as an individual. However, unlike Byron, the Brontë sisters are not writing from a male-oriented perspective; their texts do not represent the masculine search for a selfless and self-less female counterpart, but rather the feminine search for a life, whatever that life entails, of their own. Thus, their heroines are not the subordinated Byronic heroine: they are only in love with the Brontës' adaptations of the Byronic hero.

The relationship of the Byronic hero and the heroine therefore changes when his partner no longer supports his self-oriented nature and rejects a state of complete selflessness for herself. For example, Helen Huntingdon decides to leave her husband to his own debauchery after continuous confrontation with his infidelities and physical and mental abuse. After discovering one final affair, she seethes, "Oh! When I think of how fondly, how foolishly I have loved him, how madly I have trusted him, how constantly I have labored, and studied, and prayed, and struggled for his advantage; and how cruelly he has trampled on my love . . . I HATE him" (Brontë, Tenant 284). For Helen to state not only that she no longer loves her husband, but that she blatantly hates him is a passionate rejection of both the Byronic heroine's selflessness but also of her era's societal expectations for wives as a whole. It would be far more conventional for Helen to continue to attempt to save her husband from himself, thus sacrificing herself in the name of his salvation. Similarly, when Jane first wants to leave Rochester, it is this idea of the

female partner as the lover-redeemer that he evokes in his pleas for her to stay, as he begs, "You will not be my comforter? My rescuer?" (Brontë, Jane Eyre 281). While both Jane and Helen cite traditional ideas of morality in their refusal to stay with these men, they also each in turn reject the ideal of saving a corrupted lover. For Anne and Charlotte to assert in this way their heroines' needs over that of their male lovers is, beyond a simple rejection of patriarchy, additionally and more importantly a positive valuation of the women themselves.

Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, however, stands in contrast to the male-dominant power struggle that exists between Helen and Huntingdon, and Jane and Rochester. In the case of the second generation, it is Catherine who opens Hareton's naturally bright mind, teaching him to read with her "sincere commendations" as "a spur to his industry" (Brontë, Wuthering Heights 322). Yet, she does not dominate him, as he demonstrates by his defense of Heathcliff (321). Heathcliff and Cathy likewise achieve a roughly equal exchange, understanding themselves as part of each other. Even though Cathy believes that marrying him would "degrade her" after her brother has rendered him worse than a servant, she still asserts to Mrs. Dean, "Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff" and "he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same" (81-82). Similarly, Heathcliff equates Cathy with his soul, crying out as she dies, "Oh God! would *you* like to live with your soul in the grave?" (163). While Manfred subordinates Astarte as a component of his own selfhood and consumes her, Heathcliff and Cathy both recognize themselves in the other and consume each other into one component identity. Cathy and Heathcliff are essentially two halves of the same Byronic soul, despite their separate bodies, and within their relationship no power struggle exists between the conventional masculine and feminine identities.

Although a power struggle still occurs between them, Emily strips it of the gendered framework of the hero attempting to achieve dominance over the heroine. Instead, Heathcliff and Cathy struggle to come to a spiritual, rather than a physical, détente. While Cathy at first rejects Heathcliff in her choice to marry Edgar Linton, she nevertheless wishes on her deathbed that Heathcliff never forget her, to "writhe in the torments of hell" alive, while she is "at peace" dead (Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 160). Cathy's greater wealth and social standing privilege her over Heathcliff while alive, yet her efforts to subordinate him to her memory after her death demonstrate the limitations of that power. Moreover, despite her desire to achieve "peace" in death, Cathy never achieves that peace without Heathcliff, as the way in which she haunts Wuthering Heights demonstrates. Instead, as Lockwood relates, she searches for Heathcliff, crying, "let me in . . . I've been a waif for twenty years" (25). Emily finally stresses that her lovers are inherently equal in their inability to exist at rest without each other. In fact, the only kind of repose that their unhappy souls can attain is to haunt Wuthering Heights together, as one little boy tells Lockwood, "They's Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t' Nab (336). As Irving H. Buchen argues, "The separation of Heathcliff and Catherine from each other reenacts the initial exile from God and the initial state of being born" (67). Thus, when Heathcliff joins Cathy in death, their spirits can finally be reunited on the complete and equal terms they so passionately desired in life, and which were always their definition of a heaven.

In Byron's *Manfred*, there is no corresponding heaven for his hero. The spirit Nemesis finally conjures up Astarte so that Manfred can attempt to resolve his moral conflict via her forgiveness. He begs her apparition, "I cannot rest / I know not what I ask, nor what I seek: / I feel but what thou art – and what I am; / And I would hear yet once before I perish / The voice which was my music – Speak to me!" (Byron 3.4 500-504). Nevertheless, Manfred cannot undo

his destruction of Astarte's subjectivity, despite his assertion that "I feel but what thou art," and Astarte cannot grant Manfred her forgiveness. She can only repeat his name in response, in this way becoming fully and completely only a reflection of him. Denied therefore the only true moral reconciliation he thinks he can find, Manfred refuses to reconcile with God before his death; instead, he embraces his humanity utterly, with its flaws, as the only authentic act of value and self-assertion left to him before hell. Read through the Brontës' texts, the Byronic hero's final self-condemnation in *Manfred* becomes a condemnation as well of his consumption of the heroine. Through the manner in which he appropriates her subjectivity, he prefaces his own self-destruction, indicating the inherently broken nature of his character, as the Brontës further suggest through their texts' attempted redemption of him.

II. The Lover-Redeemer

Even as the Brontë sisters refuse to objectify their heroines in relation to the Byronic hero, their adaptations of the type continue to implicate a gendered power struggle within their texts. For each sister, the Byronic hero and his subordinated, hero-reflecting heroine become associated with the contemporary figure of the lover-redeemer; that is, with the idea that the love of a good woman has the power to save a corrupt and erring man. Although the concept of the Byronic hero demands that the heroine reflect her male partner, and that of the lover-redeemer insists that the hero become like his pious female partner, in both cases the heroine still sacrifices herself. This emphasis on the hero's subjectivity and moral growth is, as the Brontës suggest, inherently restrictive for women as it curtails their individuality as complex persons, rather than as idealized moral guides. Also, the texts indicate, it is an impossible task for society to expect women

successfully to impose moral reform on men. For both sexes, the Brontës represent morality and moral roles within their texts fundamentally as a matter of individual choice.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Huntingdon structures his wife's submission to him in the same terms of those of a convert to her god. As he tells his wife, "To my thinking, a woman's religion ought not to lessen her devotion to her earthly lord" (Brontë 190). However, Helen rebuts his complete ownership of her as her "earthly lord," stating, "'I will give my whole heart and soul to my Maker if I can . . . and not one atom more of it to you than He allows. What are you, sir, that you should set yourself up as a god?" (191). As Sharon Marcus writes, at the time of the novel's publication, Victorian ideas of marriage were shifting away from the previous "hierarchical bond dictating that inferior wives obey their superior husbands" to new "terms of affection, companionship and equality – alongside the persisting economic, legal and political dependence of wives on husbands" (26). Still, Anne sets *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as do Charlotte and Emily with their own respective texts, well before the Victorian era, in Anne's case twenty years before, during the Regency period. Ian Ward explains, "[T]he historical setting is not intended to insulate the novel. Arthur Huntingdon might have lived and died in a previous generation. But there are, Brontë insinuates, plenty of Arthurs still to be found walking the shires of England" (168). Taken together, Marcus and Ward suggest that although Brontë was writing during a period of higher expectations for women within marriage, Helen's husband still prioritizes his own needs and desires in a way that demonstrates his utter moral corruption. Huntingdon echoes the Byronic hero's subordination of his heroine and, contextualized in Helen's pious refusal to relinquish her faith, prefaces the collapse of their relationship.

As Huntingdon problematizes Helen's efforts to reconcile her marriage with her own values and moral identity, Rochester also strives in a god-like fashion to recreate Jane in his own

image. At their engagement, he sets out to eliminate the elements of her identity that conflict with his own, namely, her lack of social standing and wealth. He remedies her perceived defects with clothes and fine jewelry, but, Jane states, "the more he bought me, the more my cheeks burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation" (Brontë, Jane Eyre 236). Even as Rochester strives to dress Jane in the costume of an upper-class woman, "a rich silk of the most brilliant amethyst dye, and a superb pink satin," she threatens to "wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter" (237). As F. A. C. Wilson argues, "Mr. Rochester is greatly charmed by the flexibility of the situation in which he finds himself, which gratifies the needs of his nature, but neither his enjoyment of Jane, nor his respect for her prevent him from treating her as chattel, a love object, and, at times, an object of his sadism" (44). Although Wilson may exaggerate his point, Rochester does objectify Jane in this way, directly translating the master-servant dynamic to his romantic relationship with her. However, while Jane may call Rochester "master," a situation that ultimately continues even after their marriage, she still chafes against the early dependency that Rochester forces on her as his objectified "chattel." Even as she verbally indicates his mastery of her, she undermines it by her own subjectivity.

For Anne and Charlotte, the process via which Helen and Jane strip their partners of their self-deification becomes as an inherent piece of adapting the Byronic hero to their feminist texts; for Emily, in contrast, that self-deification operates outside of the conventional male-dominant power dynamic. Both Cathy and Heathcliff use spiritual language to describe their relationship with the other. Cathy declares to Nelly of Heathcliff that "Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same" (Brontë, Wuthering Heights 81). Similarly, as she lies dying, Heathcliff declares to Cathy, "Oh God, would you like to live with your soul in the grave?" (163). As in relation to *Manfred*, each reciprocally raises the other to a religious conviction as they implicate

an afterlife in their rhetoric; they reject the strict subordination of the heroine in their equal subordination as lovers. Cathy and Heathcliff become "God" to each other, and it is that passion that *Wuthering Heights* ultimately deifies rather than one partner over another. Furthermore, unlike the obliteration of the self that Helen and Jane fear in their respective relationships, Cathy and Heathcliff embrace, as they say, their own souls in their mutual consumption of one another. Neither plays lover-redeemer because neither Heathcliff nor Cathy seeks redemption, and certainly not in a manner that uses the other as a route to spiritual purity.

Nevertheless for Cathy, Heathcliff's separate existence is part of her prison as well as her route to transcendence. He is at once other and herself. At the time of her death, she says, "I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it" (162). "Catherine Earnshaw," as Enid L. Duthie argues, "wanted freedom to penetrate beyond the bounds of self and communicate with a wider life" (212). Catherine also desires to escape herself, as evidenced by the fact that, although she tells Nelly that "I am Heathcliff," she marries Edgar Linton, whose soul she describes as so different from her own as a "moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire" (Brontë, Wuthering Heights 81). Still, Catherine recounts a dream to Nelly that suggests she will not be happy married to Edgar. "[H]eaven did not seem to be my home," she states, "and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy" (81). "Heaven," in this instance, does not imply Edgar is a morally perfect; after all, Catherine's first introduction to the Lintons is their war over their puppy (48-9), suggesting that he is more morally complex than his status as a foil to Heathcliff would suggest. The Lintons' treatment of their puppy becomes even more morally nuanced in

connection with Heathcliff and Hareton's harsh treatment of puppies, which links to their destructive Byronism. Instead, the "Heaven" that Catherine describes only holds joy and peace, an abrasive state for Catherine in practice, even as she chafes against her nature's unsettling passion. As both prison and liberation, Heathcliff through his separate physical existence traumatizes Cathy, but her definition of spiritual liberation is also the reunification of her soul with his own.

Similarly, Helen and Jane crave liberation. At first, however, Helen does not recognize the dangerous implications of the lover-redeemer role. She reflects of Huntingdon: "There is essential goodness in him; and what delight to unfold it! If he has wandered, what bliss to recall him! . . . Oh! If I could but believe that Heaven has designed me for this!" (Brontë, Tenant 142). Although written after this period, Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House* corroborates this position of moral guide for women. Patmore's poem "Preludes" claims of women, "Marr'd less than man by mortal fall, / Her disposition is devout, / Her countenance angelical; / The best things that the best believe; / Are in her face so kindly writ / The faithless, seeing her, conceive / Not only heaven, but hope of it" (Patmore 23). Huntingdon himself accepts that Helen will become his moral savior, accepting the responsibility for his character without the true power to effect such change. As he tells her, "[T]he very idea of having you to care for under my roof would force me to moderate my expenses and live like a Christian" (161). Yet when they are married, Helen feels trapped by her husband's unrepentant nature, especially as, despite his physical and mental abuses, she has no recourse to law. According to Matus, "The only way to end a marriage before 1857 was by ecclesiastical annulment or private act of Parliament" (108). Within the novel as a whole, Helen serves as a moralistic warning to young female readers, potentially attracted to a Byronic-like hero and then trapped with him for a lifetime. Still, Helen

herself never fully rejects the romance of the dangerous lover, and up to Huntingdon's death, she continues to believe that she can save him through her own purity.

In contrast, Jane openly refuses to "save" Rochester when he begs her to stay with him against her personal values. Like Anne's treatment of Helen's conflicted moralities as a wife and mother in Victorian society, Charlotte as well presents Jane's choice as two moral choices in conflict rather than explicitly privilege her heroine's subjectivity as a reason in its own right. When Rochester finally confesses to Jane his secret, that his wife Bertha is alive and insane, he, like Huntingdon, uses the language of the lover-redeemer. Whereas Bertha corrupted him, Jane will purify him: He tells her that he will revisit Europe on their honeymoon now "'healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter'" (Brontë, Jane Eyre 229). To which Jane asserts in reply, "'I am not an angel . . . and I will not be one until I die: I will be myself' (229). Although Patmore did write *Angel in the House* after the Brontë novels, this idea of women as self-sacrificing "angels" was becoming deeply ingrained in Victorian society (Ward 153). While Jane pointedly declares her own identity as, she says, "myself," Rochester continues to try and make her conform to this role of lover-redeemer and thus connect her life to his own. Finally, he begs her, "'You will not be my comforter, my rescuer?" (281). Jane's refusal to, in fact, be his "comforter" and "rescuer" indicates Jane's nuanced refusal to sacrifice herself for her lover, at least at the cost of her conscience. As she clearly privileges herself in this way, she removes herself from the male-oriented sphere which Rochester controls. In this context, Rochester's declarations of love are simultaneously an attempt to regain power over her.

In *Wuthering Heights*, love and moral power are similarly intertwined, if less so for Cathy and Heathcliff, then for the generation that follows them. While Heathcliff shares a largely spiritual and thus genderless connectio with Cathy, he re-establishes himself as a force

for patriarchal dominance through his treatment of her daughter Catherine. In the same way that he previously appropriates ideals of romantic heroes in marrying Isabella, he then frames his son Linton to Catherine as an object for the lover-redeemer. Although Heathcliff tells her that Linton will die of love for her (Brontë, Wuthering Heights 233), Linton himself says that "I believe your kindness has made me love you deeper than if I deserved your love, and though I couldn't, and cannot help showing my nature to you, I regret it, and repent it, and shall regret it, and repent it, 'til I die!" (254). Once more love becomes expressed through an interaction of the woman's purity and the man's own lack, a power dynamic that outwardly privileges her in terms of activity and power because she exerts this so-called superiority over him. Heathcliff utilizes the appeal of this romantic situation to rope Catherine in, urging her to visit his son as a positive influence on his weak and irritated nature. This fact further demonstrates the failure of this superficial display of female agency, as *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Jane Eyre* also present it. While this role seems to express value for women's "natural" virtues, granting them an authority in their relationships with their partners, it simultaneously demands a self-sacrifice that curtails their genuine agency, as Catherine's marriage to Linton indicates.

This interplay between the appearance of feminine power and the patriarchal power that in fact operates behind that image traps women. When Heathcliff forces Catherine to marry his son, he says, "Linton can play the little tyrant well," (Brontë, Wuthering Heights 274) and Linton does not improve morally or emotionally, despite all of Catherine's best efforts to play his "angel." Nevertheless, her second marriage does reward to some extent similar lover-redeemer efforts. While Hareton is not necessarily morally corrupt or even morally frustrated like Linton, Catherine allows her second husband to express the refined nature that Heathcliff has repressed in him through lack of education. As Kate Flint indicates, it is the marriage of Hareton and

Catherine that is the "successful marriage" of the text, as "Hareton and the younger Catherine's relationship is a triumph of civilised norms, of domesticity. Even so, it quietly challenges conventional power relations. It is Cathy who teaches Hareton to read" (177). Through that relationship, Catherine achieves the ideal of creating domestic harmony, largely concluding the tensions that have wracked the Earnshaw and Linton families for two generations. Yet, as Hareton's generous love for Heathcliff suggests (Brontë 320-321), while Catherine may facilitate this domestic harmony, she does not "fix" Hareton in the way that she strove to do unsuccessfully with Linton. Hareton was an intelligent and decent man by nature. Linton and Hareton's natures exist beyond the realm of Catherine's true power to change them. In this way, Emily shows the role of lover-redeemer in *Wuthering Heights* to be false.

Much in the same way, Charlotte demonstrates that Jane cannot save Rochester through her own moral authority in *Jane Eyre*. Although her desertion initiates a period of mourning and self-reflection for him, she herself has refused the role of lover-redeemer that he offers her. At first Rochester becomes more Byronic when he loses Jane, as a servant later relates to her: "he grew savage – quite savage on his disappointment: he never was a wild man, but he got dangerous after he lost her. He would be alone too . . . He broke off all acquaintance with the gentry and shut himself up like a hermit at the Hall" (Brontë 378). Evoking Manfred's own grief over the loss of Astarte, embodied in a new "wildness" and isolation, Rochester originally regresses to his previous "wildness" after the collapse of his marriage to Bertha. Still, as Peter Grudin writes, "When Thornfield burns he rescues the servants in accordance with *noblesse oblige* and the standards of Byronic heroism. When, however, he climbs up to the leads to save his mad wife, his action is something more than this: it is total selflessness, for he could only gain from Bertha's death" (156). For Rochester, this selfless effort to save his first wife is not so

much a rejection of the Byronic hero's selfish treatment of his partner (because this selflessness is dramatically heroic), but it does materialize as a moment of redemption for him. By this act of sacrifice, by performing the role of lover-redeemer in a new, physical sense, Rochester purifies himself to later win back Jane's love and her hand in marriage by his own morality.

Unlike Rochester, Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* refuses to save himself. As Charlotte argued to W.S. Williams in rebutting his likening of the two men, "there is no likewise between the two; the foundation of each character is entirely different" (Matus 117). In all three Brontë texts, Emily, Charlotte and Anne each echo this view that individual nature expresses itself in essentially stable and consistent ways. Thus, where Rochester may correct himself, Huntingdon refuses to repent even with Helen by his side, faithfully fulfilling the role of "angel." On his deathbed, he tells his wife (who has returned to him): "Oh, Helen, if I had listened to you, it never would have come to this! And if I had heard you long ago – oh, God! How different it would have been!" (Brontë 413). However, he still refuses to repent, insisting that "'it is quite gone now!'" before he finally dies (414). While Marianne Thormahlen may unjustifiably recognize Helen as "the factor that accelerates [Huntingdon's] downfall," she observes that she performs the role of lover-redeemer perfectly, except of course for the fact that Huntingdon refuses to be redeemed (836-837). Until the end, Helen persists in her self-sacrificial role as his wife, promising her husband that "I would give my life to save you, if I might!" (Brontë 413). For Anne, Helen's relentless devotion to her husband as his moral prop demonstrates that even under ideal circumstances, the rehabilitation of the rake remains a false myth.

Therefore, all three Brontë sisters together deconstruct in their texts the ideal of the love of a good woman's saving influence on a corrupt man, presented as the Byronic and dangerous lover. Not only, however, is this task of another's moral rehabilitation an impossible one, as

each text also insists on the basic self-sovereignty of human nature, but it is a task that inherently restricts women to an other-oriented role. These heroines are at once attracted to the scandalous charms of the dangerous lover and expected to confront that immorality. Essentially, however, it is not their own personal growth that society expects them to pursue, but that of their male partner, subordinating their own identities to serve only as a tool for his redemption. This process layers objectivity against subjectivity, as both the hero and the heroine alternately accept roles in this dynamic that are simultaneously passive and active. While the hero's need for the heroine's moral guidance suggests a lack of individual ability in this area, a lack of subjectivity, it furthermore restricts her own expression of identity by forcing her to conform to the Victorian "angel." Her moral activity introduces moral passivity in him, while her lack of true identity renders her passively subject to the outcome of his own active individuality, that is, her moral efforts in him. For the Brontë sisters to reject this dynamic creates for their characters, both male and female, a new emphasis on the potential of their own natures.

III. Making a "Hero" out of the Heroine

As the Brontë sisters reject the figure of the lover-redeemer through their heroines, they indicate that their heroines are also rejecting certain societal conventions like their Byronic partners. As their portrayals of their heroines' failed or uninterested efforts to sacrifice their own identities to save their lovers suggest, that role restricts female self-expression by its idealized morality and prized idea of purity for women. Their sexual attraction to the Byronic hero demonstrates, however, that these women are "dark" like their partners in their own desire for self-fulfillment even at the cost of social transgression. They do not seek only to join the Byronic hero outside of restrictive society, but to become Byronic themselves through a similar freedom. In Byron's

texts, the Byronic heroine is not Byronic herself so much as a subordinate appendage to the hero. Yet, in the Brontës' texts, their heroines can become Byronic in a way that appropriates the qualities that Byron himself denied his female characters. These women can assume the same drive towards self-fulfillment despite confronting certain ideals of womanhood and femininity; even so, the Brontë sisters do make some concessions to societal expectations, such as those governing gender or religion, "taming" the Byronic hero in their female adaptations.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen's introduction to Huntingdon suggests her own attraction to his Byronism corruption, despite her seeming purity. When Helen meets him, he first appears as a foil to Mr. Boarham, or "Bore'em" as Helen writes in her journal "for a terrible bore he was" (Brontë 124). While Helen's aunt approves of the respectable but charmless Mr. Boarham, it is Huntingdon who captivates her niece, as he rescues her from "Bore'em" by asking her to dance. As a counterpoint to Mr. Boarham, who never dances, Huntingdon immediately emerges as a more appealing option to Helen, as she writes further, "There was a certain graceful ease and freedom in all he said and did, that gave a sense of repose and expansion to the mind, after so much constraint and formality as I had been doomed to suffer" (125). Still, she remarks, "There might be, it is true, a little too much boldness in his manner and address" (125). From the first therefore, Anne suggests that Huntingdon could be for Helen a way out of the demanding social conventions that restrict her, even as she implies that he could pose his own risks. Originally, Helen sees Huntingdon as a source of "ease and freedom," and, once more as opposed to the solid and seemingly asexual Mr. Boarham, Huntingdon evokes sexuality by asking Helen to dance. Among the sisters' texts, it is Anne in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* that most explicitly connects the appeal of the Byronic hero with pure sexual attraction. As Tess O Toole writes, "In presenting Helen's attraction to her first husband, Brontë daringly implies that

her heroine's culturally sanctioned role as the would-be reformer of a sinful man serves as a cover for her sexual attraction to him, but a hellish marriage punishes Helen for succumbing to her desire for Arthur" (716). Therefore, while Helen fails in converting Huntingdon, in his own turn he offers her the possibility of sharing in his libertine freedom, of converting her.

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte similarly undermines the male-dominant power struggle in Jane's introduction to Rochester. When Jane first sees Rochester on the road, she imagines the shadowy figure as an element of the supernatural, a position of ambiguous power, or in, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's words, "that universe of male sexuality" (351). Yet, Charlotte immediately subverts that masculine power by Rochester's fall from his horse; it is in fact Jane who then asserts dominance over him by insisting on helping him. As she narrates, "He laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and leaning on me with some stress, limped to his horse" (Brontë 100). The scene prefigures the way in which the text leaves the couple, as Jane becomes Rochester's guide and prop in his blindness. Yet, despite the way in which she does become his guide in a physical sense in this first scene and by the novel's conclusion, Rochester importantly retains here the power of information, as Jane does not know his identity. Within the text as a whole, this knowledge of course extrapolates to Rochester's hidden first marriage to Bertha, once more limiting Jane's usefulness as a true help to him because she herself lacks awareness in her naïveté and innocence. While she is a more moral person than Rochester demonstrates himself to be, at least on the grounds of having had less opportunity for sexual self-corruption, Jane's refusal to act as the lover-redeemer is also a refusal to allow him to corrupt her through implication in his own "sinful" choice despite her attraction to him; such an emphasis on egalitarianism also foreshadows the unconventional relationship that they develop.

In *Wuthering Heights*, this romantic reciprocity, however, becomes more spiritual than sexual. Heathcliff first appears as a child, when Mr. Earnshaw brings him home, having found the boy "starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb in the streets of Liverpool" where "[n]ot a soul knew to whom it belonged" (Brontë 37). Heathcliff already exists outside of society, and Mr. Earnshaw's adoption of him is also an effort to reincorporate him, much in the same way that the "dangerous lover" is traditionally reformed, described by Lutz who states, "[T]he hero set up as dangerous" will "be reformed in the end, brought from the outside into the domestic life of the heterosexual couple" (11). Yet, this reformation never occurs through his romantic relationship with Cathy. Heathcliff is inherently a stranger, albeit interconnected with Cathy as one soul. In her turn, she cannot rest without him, as her ghostly appearance to Lockwood demonstrates, when she cries to him "let me in . . . I've been a waif for twenty years" (Brontë 25). Unlike she had hoped, she has not found spiritual liberation in the technical release of her body because half of her remains alive and corporeal, the part that is Heathcliff. While Cathy and Heathcliff consume each other spiritually, it is the next generation, Catherine and Hareton, who engage in a potential sexual partnership through marriage. Even so, that marriage is only explored through their engagement, supporting the text's presentation of love as spiritual and almost unconnected to physical love. As Lucasta Miller writes of Cathy and Heathcliff's love, "Not only is it never consummated, but it is, in a sense, incapable of consummation, since it reaches back to the childhood time before the fall into the self and other when Cathy and Heathcliff were surrogate brother and sister" (242). Sexuality within *Wuthering Heights* nearly does not exist, even in the case of Isabella's attraction to Heathcliff, which is desexualized by its framing romantic innocence. Instead, the text emphasizes through its foremost couple,

Heathcliff and Cathy, their passionate Byronic love as something spiritual and thus in-born in both of them, lifelong rather than one partner influencing the other.

Yet, in all three texts, romantic rivals are first sexual rivals. In *Wuthering Heights*, Edgar Linton cannot compete with Heathcliff for Cathy's love, only for her physical body as his wife. Likewise, Heathcliff never loves Isabella, despite their child. Still, these physical relationships, embodied as marriages, do divide Cathy and Heathcliff from each other and heighten the spiritual dissonance that they suffer in their inability to achieve complete union. Yet, the emphasis in *Wuthering Heights* remains on spiritual love, unlike *Jane Eyre* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which use these rivalrous relationships to contain and restrict the sexuality that Jane and Helen themselves express in their attraction to the hero. For example, Rochester as a gypsy fortune teller mocks Blanche, informing Jane, "she probably loves him, or, if not his person, at least his purse" (Brontë 175). While Charlotte criticizes the way in which Blanche presents sexuality as saleable, Anne similarly uses Huntingdon's lover as a counterpoint to her heroine, whose own virtues become defined against the sins of the adulterous woman. Lady Lowborough is inherently corrupt; as Helen relates later, "[she] eloped with another gallant to the Continent, where, having lived a while in reckless gaiety and dissipation, they quarrelled and parted . . . she sunk, at length, in difficulty and debt, disgrace and misery" (Brontë, Tenant 425). While Anne and Charlotte therefore do, liberally, admit female sexuality through their heroines' attraction to the Byronic hero and their heroines' adaptation of Byronism themselves, they nevertheless continue to enforce limitations on that sexuality through their presentation of their rivals, who appear as immodest foils.

Such a use of female rivals to contain sexuality becomes even more pointed in *Jane Eyre*, as Charlotte largely strips female sexuality even of the justifying maternity that Anne presents in

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. "[What] giant propensities!" Rochester tells Jane of his wife, "[she] dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste" (Brontë, Jane Eyre 270). Like Blanche, Rochester's first wife Bertha implies an "unnatural" sexuality, but she furthermore appears, in Gilbert and Gubar's words, as a "doppelganger" to Jane, who is as sexually pure as Bertha herself is corrupt. As they state, when Jane discovers Bertha at her wedding, "it now begins to appear, if it did not earlier, that Bertha has functioned as Jane's dark double *throughout* the governess's stay at Thornfield. Specifically, every one of Bertha's appearances – or, more accurately, her manifestations – has been associated with an experience (or repression) of rage on Jane's part" (360). Thus, Charlotte expands Jane's sexuality to include other elements of her selfhood that society restricts her ability to express, such as in this instance, her "unfeminine" emotions.

Sexuality becomes indicative not only of the passivity that society imposes on Jane in terms of her body, but also in the terms of her identity as it negates the aspects of her selfhood that do not conform to Victorian conceptions of womanhood. Gilbert and Gubar elaborate, "[I]t seems to not have been primarily the coarseness and sexuality of *Jane Eyre* which shocked Victorian reviewers (though they disliked those elements in the book), but, as we have seen, it's 'anti-Christian' refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society – in short, its rebellious feminism" (Gilbert 338). In Jane's case, a notable example becomes the way in which "she casts herself as criminal: her crime – the violation of the first rule of feminine propriety – to be a woman who loves without the sanction of the prior declaration of the man" (London 200). Yet, Bertha rejects in her madness such restrictions – she is sexually corrupt and consumed by rage. As a result, her social transgressions have literally driven her mad, as Grudin writes: "Bertha's pathology is clearly modeled on a then recent scientific theory, the notion of 'moral

madness' propounded in the thirties by the psychologist James Cowles Prichard" (4). Still, Charlotte suggests, Jane herself is also "mad" like Bertha and thus in conflict with society.

Nevertheless, despite the ways in which Bertha correlates with Jane, she has become bestial in her moral, particularly sexual, corruption. She is no longer a woman but an animal: "a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered in clothing" (Brontë, Jane Eyre 258). Bertha is consumed by passion, in the same way that others have labeled Jane as uncapable of controlling her own emotions throughout the text; for example, her Aunt Reed describes her as "a compound of virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity" (Brontë 12). Critic Peter Grudin connects Bertha and Jane through Bertha's visitation on the eve of Jane's wedding to Rochester, when she ironically puts on Jane's wedding veil; he writes, "Admiring herself in this garb, Bertha turns to the mirror. This is the medium through which Jane first glimpses those veiled, discolored features" (8). This scene at once suggests the way in which Bertha parodies Jane's own sexual innocence and how the mirror undermines it, offering Jane Bertha's anger and sexual corruption for her own face. In Gilbert and Gubar's words:

> while the mythologizing of repressed rage may parallel the mythologizing of repressed sexuality, it is far more dangerous to the order of society. The occasional woman who has a weakness for black-browed Byronic heroes can be accommodated in novels and even in some drawing rooms; the woman who yearns to escape entirely from drawing rooms and patriarchal mansions obviously cannot. (338)

"I am insane – quite insane," Jane says when she leaves Thornfield and Rochester (Brontë, Jane Eyre 280), once more evoking the nature of Bertha's own insanity. Like Rochester, Jane herself craves to escape from the society that restricts her and from which she has isolated herself. Thus,

the sexual attraction that she feels for Rochester is only a symptom of her own Byronism, as her capacity for violent emotion, linked directly to the "passion" of her sexuality, demonstrates.

On one hand, therefore, Jane is by nature a Byronic individual in her own right, yet her relationship with Rochester becomes the route to expressing those darker Byronic yearnings. As a woman, as a poor governess, her expression of such conventionally inappropriate desires is substantially curtailed by her society, especially in contrast with Rochester's own capacity to be sexually misadventurous and to use his wealth to self-isolate. Furthermore Grudin writes, "Although some latitude and potential for salvation is offered to the sexually licentious man, Charlotte Brontë's independence of thought and incipient feminism do not extend such charity to the woman who transgresses society's code for feminine modesty and restraint" (14). Thus, it is Jane's refusal to become Rochester's mistress that becomes simultaneously an act of self-assertion and a re-assertion of a more traditional morality. Freedom to love, Charlotte suggests, does not necessarily extend to sexual freedom outside of marriage. Yet, even as Jane believes that no one will love her after Rochester (Brontë 318), she frames her refusal to become his mistress as a matter of self-respect, as she declares, "*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself" (Brontë 280). Jane's fundamental "*I*" becomes a personal statement of self-worth and self-valuation, rather than through conformity the value that Rochester puts on her for his reasons. Furthermore, because Jane views herself in this way, as ultimately self-defining, she is able to exit society in a way similar to that of Manfred. When she leaves Thornfield, Jane becomes truly Byronic – isolated, friendless, morally tortured, with an ambiguous history, yet, unlike Rochester, sexually pure.

Jane's Byronism only becomes confirmed by her next suitor after Rochester, St. John Rivers; as Rochester's rival, he restricts her Byronism in the same way that Bertha restricts her

sexuality. Where Rochester is fire, St. John is ice: he is the anti-thesis of the Byronic hero, particularly in that he is without the type's intense moral conflict. Although he is in love with a local gentleman's daughter, St. John refuses to act on his feelings for her. He sacrifices his love for her on the grounds, he says, that she would never make "'a sufferer, a laborer, a female apostle . . . a missionary's wife? No!'" (Bronte, Jane Eyre 331). Even as he desires her, he suggests no confusion or conflict about his choice. Rochester may sin in his attempt to win Jane, yet St. John appears as a pointed foil to him in his complete virtue, his sacrifice of Rosamond. Where he contrasts with the corrupt Rochester, however, St. John is also unlike Jane. "'I am cold: no fervour infects me,'" St. John tells Jane, to which she responds, "'Whereas I am hot, and fire dissolves ice'" (339). Yet, while Jane has embraced Byronism, St. John's harsh purity still can oppress her: as she says, "'I fell under a freezing spell'" (352). St. John thus offers an alternative not only to Rochester in marriage, but also to his Byronism, presenting Jane the possibility of his cold purity instead of fierce, albeit corrupt, passion. Like Rochester, St. John also demands Jane's sacrifice, yet for purity not passion. Jane's passionate soul rails against the loveless marriage that St. John presses on her, as he decides that she would make a practical missionary's wife. She questions, "Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent?" (358). Finally, she refuses him only on the grounds of that lack of love; in doing so, she refuses as well the pious but harsh alternative to Byronism that he symbolizes, immediately returning to her newly tamed Byronic Rochester. Therefore, while Jane leaves Rochester to preserve her virtue, she ultimately rejects a life founded only on such morality. Her Byronism exists somewhere between Rochester's harsh corruption and St. John's harsh purity.

Wuthering Heights similarly links its heroines, Cathy and Catherine, with a feminine adaptation of Byronism. Although Emily emphasizes the spirituality of Heathcliff and Cathy's relationship, sidestepping the sexuality that her sisters invoke, their love still carries an under-current of violence in its fervent, fierce emotion. Yet, unlike Charlotte's Jane, whose attraction to the Byronic hero ultimately becomes a route to embracing Byronism in herself, Cathy is by nature Byronic. Throughout the novel, she demonstrates herself to be equally, if not more Byronic, than her lover Heathcliff, and it is the next generation, then, that qualifies the familial strand of Byronism, as Cathy's daughter Catherine seeks to re-integrate Hareton into a happy and harmonious domesticity. Catherine, it seems, could be another Cathy in this way, as Joseph informs the daughter, "yah'll niver mend uh yer ill ways; bud goa raight to tuh t'divil, like yer mother afore ye!" (Brontë 15). Yet, Nelly asserts, Catherine is not a replica of her Byronic mother, despite her "capacity for intense attachments," because "she did not resemble her; for she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice, and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce" (189). Nevertheless, as Beth Newman addresses, Catherine is not docile, as her gaze in response to Lockwood demonstrates; her own gaze "returns only the failure of his gaze to obtain the recognition that it has ambivalently solicited," appearing "as provoking, withering, annihilating" (1032). Catherine, therefore, does have a certain Byronic presence, one exacerbated by anger, passion and isolation through the situation that Heathcliff has imposed upon her.

To some extent, then, Catherine is fulfilling the role of "Mrs. Heathcliff" as her mother would have if she had acted according to her own nature. Yet, Catherine finally rejects that role and the name that accompanies it, by her marriage to Hareton, reclaiming her mother's earlier name and familial identity outside of Heathcliff's framework of revenge. Still, the position that

Catherine comes to occupy is complex, as Newman recognizes, "The courtship of Catherine and Hareton at the end, read in the light of the gaze, tells the utopian story of a subtle but essential transformation of the structures the novel faults. To be sure, the transformation envisaged has limits. It involves the domestication (and figurative castration) of a potent male figure (Hareton), not the release of the woman from the domestic sphere" (1036). For Newman, then, the novel's concluding "transformation" involves an act of "domestication" for Hareton's Byronism, rather than a new route to freedom for Catherine to embrace her own Byronism.

Nevertheless, despite Newman's argument, *Wuthering Heights* consistently portrays Hareton not as a figure in need of domestication, but as an individual whose inherently superior nature has been restricted by ignorance and subordination. Heathcliff delights in his abuse of Hareton principally because Hareton is such a naturally refined and intelligent man, as he describes his son in comparison to Hindley's Hareton, "But there's this difference, one is gold put to the use of paving stones; and the other is tin polished to ape a service of silver – *Mine* has nothing valuable about it . . . *His* had first rate qualities, and they are lost" (Brontë, Wuthering Heights 219). Thus, Newman's reading of the conclusion misreads the domestication effected by Hareton and Catherine. Hareton is not castrated, as she suggests, but instead can finally express and embrace his superior nature that was always there. Similarly, while Catherine may assume a domestic role at the end of the novel, rather than escape the "domestic space," she likewise assumes through that domesticity a new authority within the house.

It is Catherine who teaches Hareton to read, and while a domestic act, it likewise frames her as at least an equal partner in their relationship. Similarly, Catherine exerts a high level of influence over Hareton, as Lockwood relates, "she confessed to me her sorrow that she had endeavoured to raise a bad spirit between [Heathcliff] and Hareton" (Brontë, Wuthering Heights

322). Her efforts to re-integrate Hareton into society through books become the means for both of them to qualify and temper their own Byronism as something livable, rather than the destructive spiral that Cathy and Heathcliff invoke, with its ultimate culmination in utter self-collapse. Catherine thus addresses her Byronism by at once refusing her mother's Byronic selfishness and by challenging Heathcliff's performance of his own socially transgressive nature. With Catherine as an agent of transformation in this way, Heathcliff's Byronism becomes deeply interconnected with that of Catherine and Hareton. Yet, although her efforts to re-integrate Hareton into society through domesticity implicate Heathcliff as well, even while the house of Wuthering Heights becomes newly peaceful for its other inhabitants, Heathcliff himself never achieves a sense of peace. Though his Byronic hold over the house diminishes with the growing authority of the second generation, he still asserts to Nelly, as he dies, "I have nearly attained my heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued, and uncoveted by me!" (333). Unrepentant to the end, Heathcliff never rejects his Byronism, yet the damned tone of his death allows Hareton and Catherine the rationale to domesticate their own Byronic natures successfully.

In Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, despite all her best efforts, Helen cannot carry out a similar domestication of her husband's own Byronism. Instead, her ill-considered marriage ultimately culminates in Helen herself adopting a more Byronic identity. Nicole A. Diederich writes that at first "Helen has embraced the nineteenth-century ideal wherein the wife takes on the responsibilities for running a household and nurturing others – the children, the poor, the husband – rather than herself" (27). Domesticity has usurped Helen's personal identity, Berry confirms, stating, "the novel moves through a series of imprisoning domestic structures: the proposed marriage to the aptly named Mr. Boarham; the constraints of life at home with her aunt and uncle, and then the literal confinements of marriage itself as it is experienced with the

decadent Arthur Huntingdon" (39). As her marriage collapses, Helen becomes more and more trapped as the wife of an abusive and morally bankrupt man. After a fight, she cries out, "I am a slave, a prisoner" (Brontë, Tenant 338). Ironically, it is the depth of Huntingdon's abuse that ultimately frees Helen. As his abuses and infidelities compound, Helen finally feels justified in leaving him, she says, for the sake of her son's own moral welfare. Yet, although Helen (and also Anne) may downplay her own best interests in the name of the submissive, faithful wife, this choice also opens for her the capacity to become her own individual again.

For Helen, this new individuality emerges as deeply interconnected with her art, and a romanticized image of herself as an artist. Ward contextualizes her choice, indicating, "Middle-class women were not supposed to paint for a living any more than they were supposed to write" (166). Art, therefore, is not "feminine," according to Helen's society, especially as the sale of her art allows her to leave her husband. Yet, her old hobby is not merely a way to be financially independent; it is also an earnest means of self-expression. In one of Helen's few acts of self-assertion during her marriage, she strikes Huntingdon after he removes her art supplies and then informs the servant that "your mistress won't want them anymore" (Brontë, Tenant 335). By stripping Helen of her sole means of self-expression, Huntingdon corners his wife emotionally; after she leaves him, her art (herself) thus becomes a dominant focus of her life. To some extent, however, Huntingdon remains connected with her art. As she describes to Gilbert, her servant Rachel packed a picture of her husband that she had once painted, and "It struck me with dismay, at the moment when I took it from the box and beheld those eyes fixed upon me in their mocking mirth, as if exulting still in his power to control my fate, and deriding my efforts to escape" (362). Huntingdon, in a sense, haunts Helen through her artwork, not only in the case of this painting, but, in a larger sense, through the frame that he has erected around her artwork as a

means of self-expression for her. Art, for Helen, becomes a defiant act of self-assertion, yet at the same time, as she defies Huntingdon, she is also defying her entire society.

Thus, when Gilbert first meets Helen, she has become embodied in a Gothic type; she has now taken on elements of the Byronic hero such as self-isolation and a mysterious past. Helen lives in "Wildfell Hall," which is nearly "ruins," and one of the neighbors insists, "They tried all they could to find out who she was" but they couldn't get her to "throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connections" (6). Helen's reclusivity is a direct result, of course, from the vulnerable position she stands in relation to her husband. Ward indicates how risky it was for a woman to leave her husband during the 1820s, writing, "Although she might have been confident in her moral duty, Helen had no legal entitlement to her child. He, too, belonged in law to his father. And a father who found himself suddenly divested of a child by an absconding mother simply issued a writ of habeas corpus" (161). Still, Helen asserts, "I am not going to sell my child for gold, though it were to save both him and me from starving: it would be better that he should die with me than he should live with his father" (Brontë, Tenant 363). Helen's Byronism is thus also a result of her marginalized situation as a woman, existing in a society where she has few options. Inherent, then, in all her efforts for self-protection and the protection of her child as she sees fit, is also a rejection of societal expectations that would demand that she remain with an abusive husband and sacrifice her own best welfare.

In this way, Helen herself becomes the dangerous lover in Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as much as Charlotte's Rochester or Emily's Heathcliff in their own texts. Thus, in order to conclude, it becomes necessary to reincorporate Helen back into the domestic sphere from which she has seemingly strayed. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, Rochester returns to Jane as her dependent, a blind and crippled man, his Byronism tamed through his sacrificial efforts to save his first wife.

For Helen as well, it is the second marriage that domesticates, as she prompts Gilbert Markham to marry her (Brontë, Tenant 449). On the one hand, therefore, Helen re-enters this domestic sphere with greater authority, having learned to temper her wifely submission. For Matus, "The union of Helen and Gilbert resists the familiar romantic scenario of the rich and masterful hero, who is the means of raising the heroine to social station her beauty deserves. Rather, Helen is superior to Gilbert in almost all respects. Indeed, she raises him, not only in rank, but in moral and spiritual status as well" (109). Yet, O'Toole reminds us that it is this same Gilbert who has appropriated his wife's narrative and made public her personal journal:

> Though it may be tempting to read the events in the framing narrative as representing a recovery from the events recounted in the embedded one, such a meliorist view is challenged by the fact that the framing narrative finds Helen remarried to a man who, while not the rake that Arthur Huntingdon was, is capable, like Arthur, of violence and cowardice (as evidenced by his vicious attack on Frederick Lawrence, which he does not publicly acknowledge) (716).

Furthermore, O'Toole also rebuts that idea that Helen carries out "the successful moral education of her second husband, maintaining that Gilbert is reformed by his exposure to Helen's text and that their union redeems Helen's disastrous first marriage; in so doing, they risk reinscribing the domestic ideology that it is a part of the novel's accomplishment to problematize" (718). In fact, while Helen surrenders the clothes of her Byronism at her second marriage, allowing herself to be re-integrated into society as an apparently submissive wife and mother, Anne herself stresses Gilbert's desire to impose his own authority over Helen. As he remarks when he sees the rich estate where Helen lives after Huntingdon's death, "There was one comfort, however, all this was entailed upon little Arthur, and could not, under any circumstances, strictly speaking, be his mother's (Brontë, Tenant 438). The novel concludes, therefore, with an unsettling marriage for the heroine that in many ways seems to replicate the problems of her first marriage. Once freed,

she immediately chooses to subordinate herself again to the patriarchy that she has resisted for the entire text, largely surrendering her unfeminine Byronism to re-enter society.

For the Brontë sisters' heroines, Byronism emerges – in ironic contrast to Byron himself – as a tool for female emancipation within these texts. With its emphasis on the self, the same qualities that the Brontës adopt for their heroes become for their heroines a new recognition of their own subjectivity. The Byronic hero's dark history and isolation may add romantic charm, but it is fundamentally the character's willingness to transgress society in search of personal fulfillment that enables the Brontë heroines to challenge gender restrictions as women. Yet, at the same time, the Brontës themselves do domesticate Byronism in their female adaptations, even as they seek to problematize the conventional ideologies that restrict women to roles only as wives and mothers. While Anne, Charlotte and Emily present their heroines in conflict with situations that restrict them, as existing in a society that strives to subvert their own identity into an appendage for their male partner, there is no full rejection of domesticity or even conventional ideals of womanhood. Instead, female Byronism in these texts only allows the Brontë heroines to achieve a greater degree of self-hood and authority within the already existent framework of patriarchy. Importantly, however, the Brontës do not strive to domesticate Byronism only for their heroines, but also for their heroes. For neither sex do the Brontës present the Byronic hero as a character who can survive in a more realistic universe than that of Byron.

Conclusion

With Anne and Emily's early deaths, it was Charlotte who became the family apologist for the often controversial Brontë novels. Although her own *Jane Eyre* certainly stirred upset for its so-called "coarse" presentations of sexuality and other "passions," Charlotte in turn felt called to

pacify her sisters' critics, often in the process distancing herself from their work. Both Anne and Emily, Charlotte assured their public, were good and solid women according to the Victorian ideal. As Ward indicates with regards to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, "Even Anne's sister Charlotte felt the need to provide a posthumous apology, admitting that the 'choice of subject was an entire mistake,' and seeking to reassure their audience that 'Nothing less congruous with the writer's nature could be conceived'" (169). Similarly, Charlotte openly questions in her preface to *Wuthering Heights* the morality of Emily's creation of Heathcliff, separating her sister from the product of the writer's "creative gift" of which "he is not always master – that strangely wills and works for itself" (liii). Her discomfort with the latent violence and passion of Emily's novel is so evident that Miller suggests of a possible second novel by Emily, that, if it was "anything like the first, it would not have been surprising if Charlotte had destroyed it, as she had so many doubts about *Wuthering Heights*" (198). Nevertheless, whatever excuses Charlotte made for her sisters' writing, as well as for her own, the apparent demand for such apologies by an outraged public demonstrates the extent to which the Brontës challenged their society.

Like Byron before them, then, the Brontë sisters pushed at the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Beyond their own authorship as women, their heroines contested the way in which, like the original Byronic heroine, women had been objectified in literature. In this way, their adaptation of the Byronic hero became more accurately appropriation, as they subverted the shape of Byron's own character type to undermine his own misogynistic ideas. Furthermore, through associating Byronism with the figure of the lover-redeemer, they likewise tore down the also ideal of women as absolutely morally pure, in both cases opening up heroines to roles outside of the angel-demon paradigm. Ultimately, their adaptation of the Byronic hero informs female subjectivity with that character's social transgression and independence.

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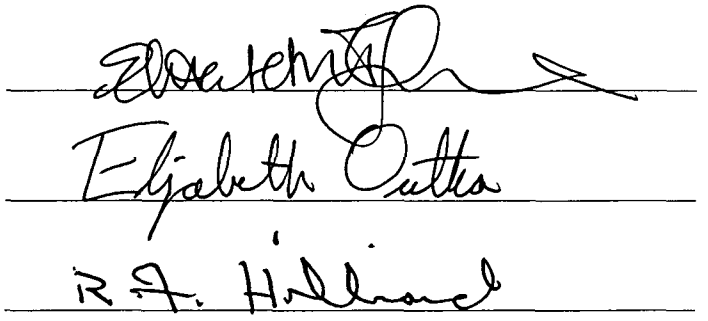

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